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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Statement submitted by the National Women's Council of Catalonia, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

1. The Platform for Action of the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women contains six strategic objectives concerning education, which are covered below, and which our statement will address.

2. Our society requires education of individuals to be directed towards the development of free, responsible, autonomous and cooperative citizens, in order to produce a real and fundamental transformation of our society, put an end to discrimination, respect differences and empower people to live together in freedom and peace. One of the goals of the educational system, and all training activities, is to ensure that all students have equal access, opportunities and treatment in education, regardless of their gender or any other social or personal condition or circumstance.

3. The objective of ensuring equal access to education by girls and boys and men and women appears to have been met as far as compulsory education is concerned, which in Catalonia, Spain, goes up to 16 years of age. The percentages of women and men enrolled in compulsory primary and secondary education are very similar, but at the *bachillerato* level girls make up 54.3 per cent of students. At university level the most recent data indicates that the number of women enrolled and earning degrees is higher than the number of men in all fields except technical studies, management and sports. As a whole, women spend more years than men in the educational system and have slightly higher enrolment rates.

4. It should be noted that not all areas of Catalonia, Spain, have the same guaranteed access to education. Rural and mountainous areas with low population density have less access to education and have deficiencies in transportation, school canteens or other educational services that in practice are made up by the women of the communities, thereby increasing their burden of care. Access to university education is also more difficult for women who live in communities at some distance from a university. Nor is equal access to education guaranteed to girls and women with disabilities.

5. The participation of women and men in the teaching profession shows a distinct imbalance. Women are in the majority among teachers in compulsory education, mainly in early childhood and primary schools, where they make up 87 per cent of the total. In secondary education that percentage drops to 57.9 and is even lower among university professors. The lower representation of women as the level of education rises holds true throughout the teaching profession, with fewer women in the higher ranks. The statistical data disaggregated by gender needed to monitor these indicators is provided by various government institutions.

6. The objective of eradicating illiteracy among women has basically been reached in Catalonia, Spain. The expansion of primary education over the last few decades has reduced illiteracy in the strictest sense to a small percentage of women. The illiteracy rate is higher among older and disabled women. At any rate, as in other countries, the literacy rate for adult men (98.9 per cent) is still higher than the rate for women (97.3 per cent).

* Issued without formal editing.

7. Functional illiteracy is much higher, but no gender-disaggregated data is available to evaluate it. Nor can we forget so-called digital or technological illiteracy — the gender digital divide — which must be taken into account even more in meeting the demands of society and the labour market.

8. The objective of improving women's access to vocational training, science and technology and continuing education is far from being achieved. This reality contrasts with the fact that women obtain the majority of outstanding scores in the *bachillerato* and have higher scores on university entrance exams. Although in principle they have more possibilities in choosing a course of study because of their better results, they continue to be underrepresented in technical fields. The number of women in vocational training courses and university degrees in technological and scientific fields is a good deal lower than that of men. The degrees with the lowest number of women are telecommunications, industrial and computer engineering. This situation is a reflection of professional discrimination against women. In the job market women still face great difficulties in sectors and professions traditionally and stereotypically considered to be male. Some universities, like the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, have specific programmes to attract more women to technical fields where they are underrepresented. Women scientists also face restrictions in their professional careers, reflected in their lower representation in the higher ranks.

9. The objective of developing non-discriminatory education and training is covered in the Equality Act of 2007, which stipulates the inclusion of obligatory gender content in study plans for all university degrees. In practice university degrees are granted without the fulfilment of this requirement, and it is very difficult to set up a curriculum offering required or elective courses designed from a gender perspective and/or with gender content.

10. As for mixed schools, it can be said that they are generally available in Catalonia, Spain, both at the primary and the secondary levels, although there are still a small number of private schools segregated by sex. However, enrolment in a single universal educational system for both sexes coexists with unequal relationships between boys and girls, perpetuating inequality and differences among students on the basis of sex. The *Institut Catala de les Dones*, which includes coeducation among the objectives of the Women's Policy Plan of the Government of the Generalitat of Catalonia (2008-2011), has published educational materials and offers training on coeducation. The Department of Education of the Generalitat of Catalonia has developed a gender policy and equal opportunity plan (2008-2011) and has a coeducation programme which is applied in some fifty primary and secondary schools throughout Catalonia.

11. The current context of the global economic crisis and widespread cuts in services also affects resources available for education. Therefore, the objective of allocating sufficient resources for and monitoring the implementation of educational reforms is not being achieved and all indications are that resources will continue to decline in the future. It should be noted that the percentage of the GDP of Catalonia, Spain, allocated to education before the economic crisis was still below the average for Spain and Europe and there is no indication that this ranking can change in the coming years.

12. Lastly, as for the objective of promoting lifelong education and training for girls and women, more women than men are involved in adult education, but this

data is directly related to the fact that the rate of illiteracy among women still remains higher.

13. Despite the progress noted in some of the objectives, there are still many issues concerning education for girls and women that should be given priority attention. We therefore request the following:

- A gender perspective should be integrated in all actions of educational administrations: construction, signs, budgets, convocations, surveys, statistics and training activities.
- All educational establishments, from nursery school through university, should incorporate a gender perspective in their educational activities in order to build a more equal society based on coexistence and mutual respect.
- The necessary actions should be undertaken to reduce the remaining gender inequalities among studies, educational phases and members of the teaching profession.
- Access to education should be guaranteed for all girls and women, whatever their place of residence, origin, disability, beliefs, etc.
- Research on women and from a gender perspective should be conducted in universities and research centres.
- The field of education should contribute to the eradication of violence against women and all forms of discrimination against them.
- The use of non-exclusive and non-sexist language should be guaranteed in all areas of education.